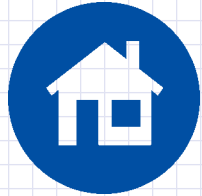


3.0 - Great Neighborhoods

3.1 - Introduction



Great neighborhoods are the foundation of a great city; they are the physical and social expressions of community. Grand Rapids' citizens are concerned about the physical quality of their neighborhoods – the housing stock, convenience to shopping and services, streets, open spaces and overall appearance. But because it is the people who live in the city's neighborhoods who ultimately determine the sustainability of investments in brick and mortar, Grand Rapids' citizens are also concerned about the quality of public education, jobs and job training, strong neighborhood organizations and collaborative decision-making.



Why Are Great Neighborhoods Important?

The citizens of Grand Rapids expressed the following beliefs in what makes a great neighborhood.

- Diversity helps to build strong neighborhoods.
- Housing choices should be made available to people of different ages, ethnicity and income levels.
- Neighborhoods should be convenient to shopping, jobs and other services.
- Neighborhoods should have strong public and/or private local schools.
- It should be easy and comfortable for someone to take a walk in their neighborhood.
- Neighborhoods should be blessed with strong local churches.
- Neighborhoods should have a particular character and style of housing.
- Strong, active associations should represent neighborhoods.
- Neighborhoods should be good places to raise a family.
- Good city services and facilities help build strong neighborhoods.
- New homes should be built on vacant lots (where appropriate).
- It is good when business people also live in the neighborhood.

The fundamental physical elements of an ideal neighborhood, that reinforces these beliefs, include walkable streets, human-scale blocks, a variety of housing choices, usable public space, an identifiable center and definable edges. Every neighborhood within the city has the potential to be “great”. Some neighborhoods hold more of the pieces to the puzzle than others, yet with appropriate strategies and a clear vision for the future every neighborhood within the city can be a place of choice that offers a quality living environment.




The Master Plan kick-off event was held at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

3.2 - Visions

One of the first steps of the master plan process was to ask the citizens of Grand Rapids what they would like to see the city look like twenty years from now. At the first community forum more than 300 people came together to discuss the future of Grand Rapids. Their discussion was guided by the information gathered during a series of neighborhood and business association meetings and discussion guide responses collected in the first two months of the planning process. Eleven major categories summarized key issues and provided participants a variety of discussion topics from which to choose. The beliefs and issues used at the forum were developed from the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified previously. Statements and images that described a vision, or preferred future, for Grand Rapids were then created by forum participants in small groups. The following visions emerged.


3.2.1 - Housing Diversity

Grand Rapids' neighborhoods will provide a variety of housing choices to appeal to the varied tastes and lifestyles of its diverse citizenry. Downtown housing, lofts, second story apartments in neighborhood business areas, historic districts, older core city neighborhoods, single-family subdivisions, senior housing and newer apartment and condominium housing will all be available. Many neighborhoods will be especially proud of the mix of housing they provide for people of a variety incomes and lifecycle stages, as well as the availability of churches, parks, shopping and schools within easy walking distance.

 **Topic:** Housing Choices
Issue: Limited choice in the type of homes

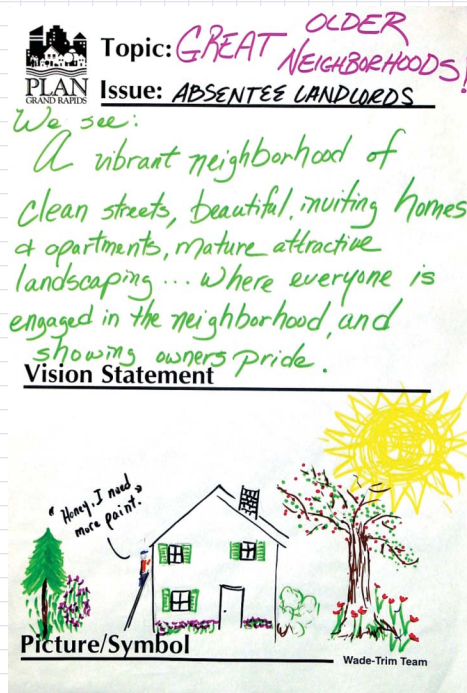
A city with a diverse base of housing styles that integrates housing for people of all incomes and generates pride in our community.

Vision Statement



Picture/Symbol Wade-Trim Team



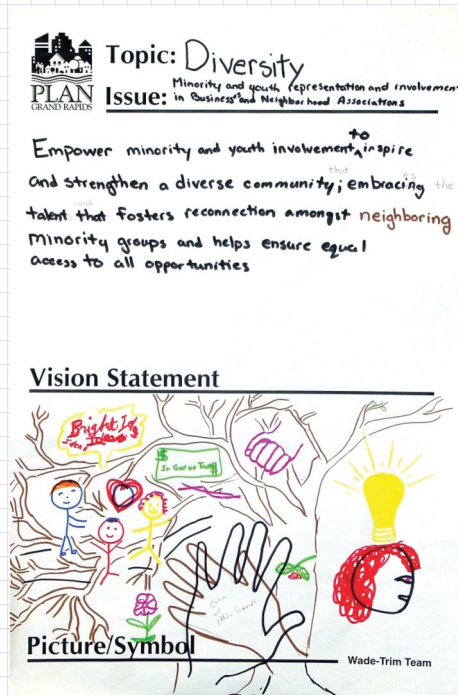


3.2.2 - Urban Heritage

We will capitalize on the urban assets of our older neighborhoods to make them the location of choice for households of all sizes, ages, incomes and races. The architectural character, compatible mix of uses, convenience and walkability of these areas will be reinforced by rehabilitating existing homes and businesses and carefully designing new infill development. Housing codes will also be important to the success of older neighborhoods. Because standards for quality and maintenance will be clearly expressed, supported by consensus and equitably applied, they will inspire all property owners to invest in their neighborhoods and take pride in their unique characters and values.

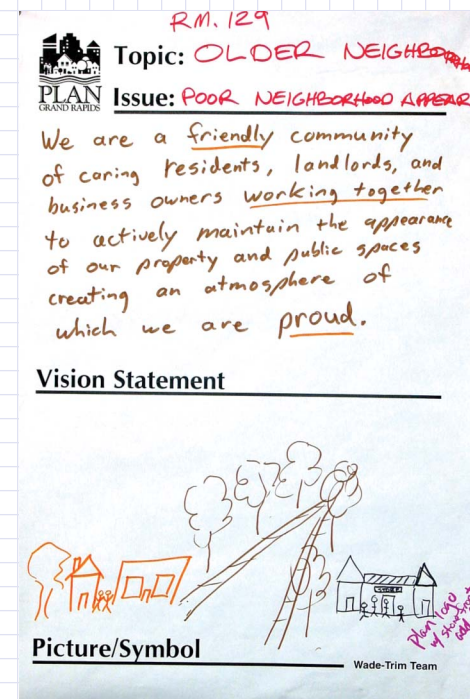
3.2.3 - Committed Home Owners, Landlords and Tenants

Home ownership for all income, racial, ethnic and disability groups will increase in many neighborhoods that have low rates of owner occupancy. Effective affordable housing and homebuyer assistance programs will help first time owners to achieve the American Dream. Grand Rapids will succeed in ensuring that rental housing is also a neighborhood asset. Landlords in our city will be responsible business professionals who maintain their rental properties to provide safe and decent homes that are also viable investments. Both landlords and tenants will be actively involved in their neighborhoods. They will be recognized for, and proud of, the contributions they make to neighborhood quality.



3.2.4 - Collaboration and Community

Grand Rapids will be a city of inviting neighborhoods because caring and committed residents, landlords and business people will work together to maintain public safety, private property and public spaces to create an outstanding quality of life. Neighborhood-based planning and collaborative problem-solving will inspire a sense of mutual respect, shared responsibility and pride within each of the city's neighborhoods. Partnerships between neighborhood residents, business people and institutional leaders will take much of the uncertainty and conflict out of planning for new development and the reuse of existing buildings.



“A Dream of a Beautiful City – That is already on the way to realization...”

The Grand Rapids of the future, a city of convenient thoroughfares, handsome structures, sightly bridges and splendid river esplanade, a city which by virtue of its beauty and advantages will attract an ever increasing number of residents.”

*A Plan for the Future Growth of Grand Rapids.
1923 - Page 11.*

“People are the reason for the development of cities. People are the reason for the development of plans.”

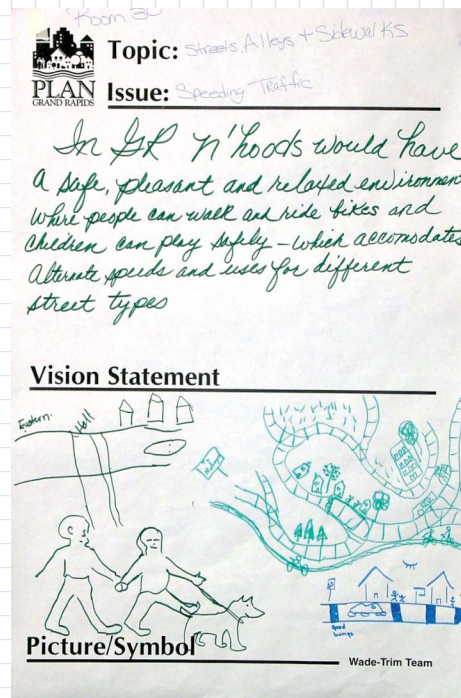
A study of people, their attributes, their habits, their ethnic composition, their desires, their use of the natural resource of land and the relation of these land uses to each other forms the basis for any realistic development proposal.

In developing the Master Plan, these considerations have been paramount. The end objective of the plan is to develop an environment conducive to the best distribution, density and movement of people in their daily pursuits. In short, the entire master plan seeks to develop a city for the people which will give them the maximum freedom and the minimum of control through a realistic appraisal of the needs of all the people.”

Grand Rapids Master Plan, 1963 - Page 24.

3.2.5 - Quality of Life

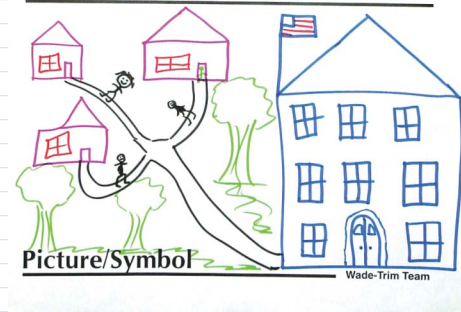
Neighborhood streets and alleys will be well lit, safe and clean. We will emphasize the importance of people-friendly, tree-lined streets in our neighborhoods by slowing traffic, maintaining space for pedestrians and accommodating cyclists. The quality of the public realm - including streets and other gathering places - will allow residents to enjoy their neighborhoods and foster the informal social interaction that creates a sense of community.



Topic: What Makes Great Neighbors?
Issue: Quality of Neighborhood Schools

Our community will benefit from strong neighborhood schools that have backing of residents, parents, and businesses to provide clean, safe, up to date buildings, and equipment. We also believe that committed, well trained teachers and their students should be recognized for their accomplishments by the media and the community.

Vision Statement



3.2.6 - Quality Education

Strong schools will also be a focus of community in our neighborhoods. Backed by residents, parents and businesses, the schools will provide clean, safe, up-to-date buildings and equipment. We will make it a point to publicly honor the accomplishments of well-trained teachers and hard-working students; steadily improving achievement test scores will be a testament to our community-wide commitment to quality schools.

Posters are from the first Master Plan Community Forum held at Central High School in March 2001.





Grand Rapids has a diverse housing stock.

3.3 - Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations focus on:

- making Grand Rapids a competitive housing location;
- providing a choice of neighborhood types, each with an expanded range of housing opportunities;
- coordinating the location of higher density residential development and transit routes;
- encouraging continuous neighborhood reinvestment; and
- improving walkability.

3.3.1 - A Competitive Housing Location

Based on past trends, demographers predict that Grand Rapids will be home to a decreasing percentage of the region's households, and a decreased overall population, in the next 20 years – even though the region's population will continue to grow. The city needs a stable or growing population, and a balance of household incomes, for several important reasons.

More Revenue - More people living in Grand Rapids means more income tax revenue. Each additional person also brings the city \$150 in state revenue sharing annually. Moreover, a growing population drives a strong demand for housing and usually results in increased property values and property tax revenues. These revenues allow the city to provide important services and amenities.

More Places to Shop - Residents provide the buying power within the city to support the kinds of retail and service offerings people would like to have in – or located conveniently to – their neighborhoods (for example, grocery stores).

Stronger Schools - More households with children can help to support neighborhood schools.

Better Transit - More people living within walking distance of transit can help to increase ridership and support expanded/improved service.

A More Sustainable Regional Growth Pattern - Accommodating a greater proportion of the metropolitan region's growing population within existing developed areas means less sprawl and its associated impacts.

Grand Rapids should take steps to ensure that the city increases its appeal within the larger metropolitan region as a residential location of choice for many



Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods

Grand Rapids neighborhoods offer people of all ages, incomes and lifestyles a broad array of choices. For the city to remain healthy, it must compete with outlying suburbs for residents. There will always be a group of people who choose to live in a rural environment; surrounding townships and villages can provide this option. Many people, however, cite the benefits of urban living and find it attractive; including reduced commuting times, convenience, cultural events, affordability and sense of community. A variety of interesting demographic and housing trends have emerged within past ten years, most notably:

- 72% of the households in the Grand Rapids metropolitan region are comprised of non-traditional households, including young adults, young married couples without children, single-parent families, empty nesters and seniors.
- 40 % of Americans living in an apartment do so by choice, not because of financial situation.
- Between 2000 and 2010, households without children are expected to grow by 19% nationally; non-family households will increase 17%; and the traditional family with children is expected to decrease by 3%.
- Households earning \$50,000 or more have been the fastest-growing segment of the apartment market between 1997-2001.



Housing diversity attracts many different types of households.

types of households. Like many other core cities, Grand Rapids is home to a disproportionate share of the region's lower income population. While quality affordable housing for these residents is essential, the city must also be able to attract middle and upper income residents to maintain a diverse population and a balance of household incomes.

Because of its diversity, history, architecture, convenience and rich cultural and educational offerings, Grand Rapids has a competitive market advantage over the typical suburban subdivision in appealing to non-traditional households. These households, including young adults, young married couples without children, single-parent families, empty nesters and seniors, now make up almost 72% of the households in the Grand Rapids metropolitan region. By providing housing choices and neighborhood environments that appeal to these segments of the housing market, Grand Rapids can achieve a sustainable balance in household demographics. Grand Rapids can also strengthen its appeal to all households - and especially families - by ensuring that the city is safe, clean and green and by working to improve quality and choice in K-12 education.

3.3.2 - A Choice of Neighborhood Types

One of Grand Rapids' greatest assets is the choice of neighborhood types the city offers. The existing characters of these neighborhoods should be protected by encouraging new development (and rehabilitation of existing buildings) to maintain overall existing patterns of density and sensitivity to the existing context in site planning and architectural design. In addition, Grand Rapids should encourage new mixed-use development that distributes higher density housing in smaller increments throughout the city and offers housing choices with special appeal to non-traditional households of a range of incomes.

Residential Densities

Existing Densities - The predominant existing residential density in the city's older (pre-World War II) neighborhoods is medium-low (MLDR); however, significant areas have also been developed at medium (MDR) and high (HDR) residential densities. In contrast, the predominant existing residential density in newer neighborhoods (post-World War II) is low (LDR); but there are a substantial number of medium-low (MLDR), medium (MDR) and high (HDR) development areas in these neighborhoods, as well. These finer grain patterns of existing residential densities across the city are represented in *Figure 3.a - Residential Density Map - Page 33* and *Figure 3.b - Residential Densities - Page 33*.

Proposed Densities - The Future Land Use Map (*Figure 2.a - Page 21*) generalizes the existing pattern of residential densities to make the map easier to read. This should not be interpreted to mean that reductions in existing residential densities in a particular neighborhood (or on a particular site) are recommended. Instead, the Master Plan proposes that overall existing patterns of residential density be maintained and that all density transitions be incremental, rather than abrupt.

The Master Plan recommends that older (pre-World War II) neighborhoods be protected and revitalized, rather than encouraging wholesale redevelopment at higher densities. Similarly, in newer (post-World War II) neighborhoods, where development pressure on vacant and agricultural land and unassembled large parcels is likely to be felt in the future, new residential development is recommended at densities consistent with what exists today. This residential development must be located and planned to protect sensitive natural areas (*see also Chapter 8 - A City in Balance with Nature - Page 103*). In proposed mixed-use areas, medium-low (MLDR), medium (MDR) and high (HDR) residential densities are



Figure 3.a - Residential Densities

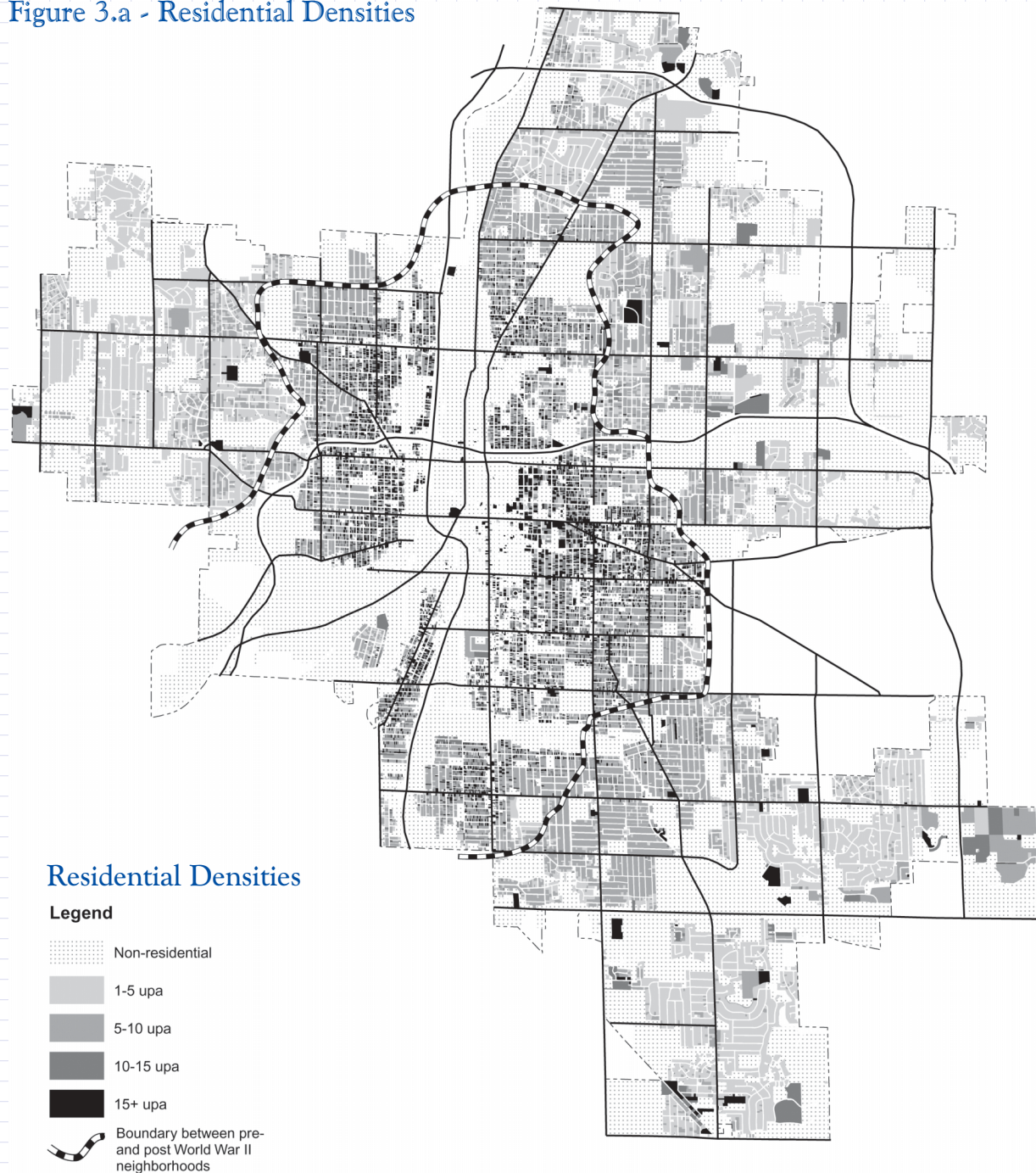


Figure 3.b - Residential Density Categories



Low-Density Residential (LDR) 1–4.9 dwelling units/acre



Medium-Low-Density Residential (MLDR) 5–9.9 dwelling units/acre



Medium-Density Residential (MDR) 10–14.9 dwelling units/acre



High-Density Residential (HDR) 15 or more dwelling units/acre



Figure 3.d - Pre-World War II Neighborhood



anticipated, with an average medium residential density overall. It is important to note that, in almost all cases, the higher density residential development in proposed mixed-use areas will replace existing industrial and commercial uses, rather than encroaching on existing low-density housing.

Figure 3.c - Residential Densities by Neighborhood Type

Neighborhood Type	LDR	MLDR	MDR	HDR
Pre-World War II		XX	X	X
Post-World War II	XX	X	X	X
Mixed-Use		X	XX	X

XX - predominant overall density
LDR - Low-Density Residential
MLDR - Medium-Low-Density Residential
MDR - Medium-Density Residential
HDR - High-Density Residential

Pre-World War II Neighborhoods

Characteristics - Older (pre-World War II) neighborhoods offer pedestrian-scale, tree-lined streets; a fine-grained mix of housing types and densities; appealing architecture and the convenience of nearby shopping districts, civic institutions and job centers. These older neighborhoods generally have small blocks defined by a grid pattern of streets (Figure 3.d - Pre-World War II Neighborhood - Page 34). Most pre-war neighborhoods include a range of residential densities. Medium- and high-density apartment buildings are often located at intersections on major streets, with medium-density duplexes providing a transition to single-family homes on small lots. Many pre-war neighborhoods also include a mix of uses, with shops and other small businesses located on major streets. This mix of uses works well, as long as non-residential uses are small in scale and maintain a clear pedestrian orientation.

A mix of densities, and of rental and owner-occupied housing, can be a neighborhood asset; allowing households to progress through life cycle stages (single, young married, raising a family, empty nest and retired) while remaining in the same part of the city. The way density and housing tenure are managed, however, makes a difference. For example, some older neighborhoods have experienced the conversion of single-family homes to multifamily occupancy. Where parking is inadequate to support this increased density and, especially, where landlords do not provide adequate management and maintenance of these rental properties, conversions often have a destabilizing influence on property values. This can be compounded by the limited financial ability of nearby retired and/or low income home owners to provide the maintenance needed to keep homes in good condition.

Neighborhoods with alleys are common in some pre-World War II neighborhoods of Grand Rapids. Alleys are key to the functioning of older and rediscovered new urban neighborhoods. The problem is that many alleys have been neglected or have fallen into relative disuse. The result is that alleys often become unattractive, forgotten areas that accumulate junk, become attractive for crime or are underutilized. Commerce and services that used to occur in alleys now take place in the streets. This puts an unusual burden on the streets in front of houses or businesses and contributes to the problems of overuse and overcrowding on the streets.

Recommendations - The Master Plan recommends that overall existing densities in pre-war neighborhoods be maintained and that rehabilitation of existing structures and new infill development be encouraged. Instead of converting single-family homes to multifamily use, higher residential densities should be incorporated in the pattern characteristic of older neighborhoods by locating small

apartment (or condominium) buildings on major streets. In some locations, where adequate parking is available, accessory units (known as “granny flats”) may also be created on single family parcels. Finally, ample opportunities exist to add higher density housing in areas proposed for mixed-use in the city’s older neighborhoods. These include traditional business areas and neighborhood and village mixed-use centers (see Mixed-Use Neighborhoods, below).

To relieve the pressure on and “de-clutter” existing streets and the front yards of residential areas, reinforce alley usage and promote alley improvement projects. Alleys can play an important role to improve circulation and services for compact residential and commercial areas.

An initial assessment of neighborhood character has identified three types of older neighborhoods in Grand Rapids: Turn-of-the-Century; Streetcar Suburb and Garden City Suburb. The approximate boundaries and distinguishing characteristics of each of these neighborhood types are illustrated in *Figure 10.a - Neighborhood Character Types Map - Page 120* and *Figure 10.b - Community Character Types - Page 121*. This information provides a starting point for preparing design standards (mandatory) and/or guidelines (advisory) that communicate expectations for the quality, character and compatibility of new development, and the rehabilitation of existing structures, in each type of neighborhood.

Post-World War II Neighborhoods

Characteristics - The city’s newer (post-World War II) neighborhoods present a more suburban lifestyle choice where housing, commercial and institutional uses are built at lower densities on larger lots with deeper setbacks. Larger areas are devoted to a single use or housing type and housing is more segregated from commercial and institutional uses. In post-war neighborhoods, blocks are generally larger, streets are

wider and the street network is less connected with many cul-de-sacs; as a result, traffic tends to be concentrated on major streets rather than distributed in smaller volumes throughout the area (*Figure 3.e - Post-World War II Neighborhood - Page 35*).

While the majority of residential development in post-war neighborhoods is low-density, they also include large medium and high-density housing complexes. These higher density developments can create a stark contrast to surrounding single family neighborhoods. They are most often treated as segregated pods that are buffered by substantial building setbacks and attached to a major street at a limited number of entrance points. For many people, the presence of these large high-density concentrations in single family areas has created a bias against higher density development and rental housing.

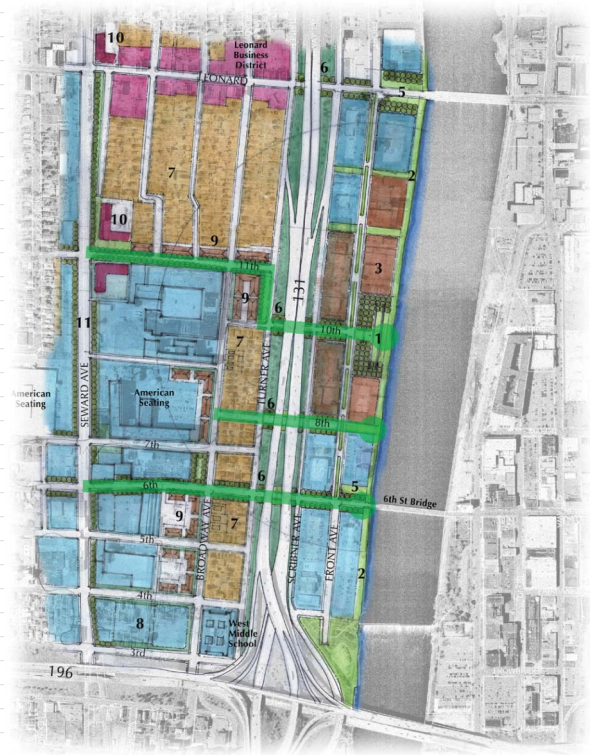
Recommendations - The Master Plan recommends an alternative approach to providing an expanded range of housing choices and higher residential densities in post-war neighborhoods, without encroaching on existing single family areas. This approach recommends restructuring existing commercial areas as mixed-use centers that include retail, services, higher density housing and civic uses in a compact, walkable area located on a transit line (see *Mixed-Use Neighborhoods - Page 36*).

Two types of post-war neighborhoods in Grand Rapids are illustrated in *Figure 10.a - Neighborhood Character Types Map - Page 120* and *Figure 10.b - Community Character Types - Page 121*. Again, this information should be used as a starting point in preparing standards and/or guidelines that maintain overall patterns of density and scale in existing neighborhoods and promote compatibility in site planning and design.

Figure 3.e - Post-World War II Neighborhood



Figure 3.f - Mixed-Use Neighborhood



Mixed-Use Neighborhoods

Characteristics - A third neighborhood type is emerging in Grand Rapids. These are the areas in and near Downtown where commercial, institutional and industrial buildings and sites have been adaptively reused for a mix of housing, offices and retail (*Figure 3.f - Mixed-Use Neighborhood - Page 36*). The North Monroe and Heartside areas are examples of this mixed-use neighborhood type.

Recommendations - The potential for new housing as a key component of mixed-use development extends far beyond the adaptive reuse of older buildings. The Master Plan recommends mixed-use development as the future land use pattern in a number of areas to capitalize on opportunities to:

- Restructure existing commercial concentrations located on transit lines in both pre- and post-war neighborhoods as compact, walkable mixed-use centers (shown as neighborhood, village and sub-regional centers in *Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21*). See also, *Chapter 4 - Vital Business Districts - Page 47*.
- Enhance the vitality of older strip commercial areas (shown as traditional business areas in *Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21*). See also, *Chapter 4 - Vital Business Districts - Page 47*.
- Transform near downtown and riverfront areas, now dominated by industrial and heavy commercial development (shown as mixed-use in *Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21*). See also, *Chapter 5 - A Strong Economy - Page 63* and *Chapter 7 - A City that Enriches Our Lives - Page 89*.
- Plan for institutional expansion on Downtown's edges in a way that provides more compatible transitions to existing neighborhoods in use intensity and building scale. See also, *Chapter 5 - A Strong Economy - Page 63*.

This mixed-use neighborhood approach will encourage the distribution of higher density and rental housing for a range of incomes (including affordable housing) in smaller concentrations throughout the city. It will also allow more compatible transitions in use and intensity to be established between commercial uses and existing lower density single family development. In addition, it will help to concentrate travel origins and destinations within easy walking distance of transit routes to support more effective operation and improved service (see also, *Chapter 6 - Balanced Transportation - Page 75*).

Encouraging mixed-use development is a critical part of the equation for creating a human scale, walkable and transit-supportive city. But it cannot – and does not – mean that “anything goes anywhere.” All mixed-use development areas (and especially those that include existing or new residential development) must be carefully planned to provide a quality environment that celebrates the diversity, vitality and convenience of urban living. Creating a compatible mix of uses requires careful planning and design to provide incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale, coherence in architectural design and a pedestrian-friendly public realm. Performance standards that control, or prohibit, external impacts that can reduce the quality of life, for example, noise, odor, truck traffic and the location and design of surface parking, are also needed.

To demonstrate how these issues can be addressed, recommended development objectives for all proposed mixed-use areas are presented in *Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37*. More detailed descriptions of the purpose and recommended uses for each type of mixed-use area are provided in *Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38*. The ideas presented in these Figures provide the recommended starting point for developing new mixed-use zoning classifications. In addition, devel-



Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas*

Development Character	Uses	Transportation and Parking
<p>Balance of Old and New</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine where existing development character should be protected and enhanced and where different land use patterns should be permitted. • Encourage the preservation and reuse of historically and architecturally significant buildings, wherever possible. <p>Building Pattern (Density, Scale and Placement)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote urban densities and a compact development pattern. • Provide incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale to promote a compatible land use mix. • Locate buildings to frame the street and screen parking. • Orient building entries, windows and/or storefronts to the street. <p>Architecture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote design excellence. • Design new buildings to be compatible with valued characteristics of the existing development context. • Provide ground level storefronts for retail and service uses on pedestrian priority streets in retail/mixed-use core areas. <p>Open Space and Streetscapes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide open spaces that serve as activity focal points and enhance area image. • Create links from neighborhoods to the primary open space system and the Grand River. • Encourage streetscape improvements that create a walkable environment. 	<p>Mix</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage investment to enhance already developed industrial, commercial and institutional areas. • Provide a fine-grained mix of housing, shopping, jobs and recreation opportunities. <p>Residential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a range of housing types and costs to accommodate a variety of incomes, ages and lifestyle choices. • Enhance market support for retail concentrations by increasing the resident population within walking distance. <p>Auto-Oriented Commercial Smaller scale auto-oriented uses (gas stations, drive-through businesses) may be acceptable as part of a mixed-use area when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a concentration/proliferation of auto-oriented use will not be created; • pedestrian orientation and safety are ensured within the core of a mixed-use center or traditional business area; • driveway curb cuts can be located and designed to minimize the disruption of pedestrian movement; and • appropriate architecture, signs, screening elements are used. <p>Large Footprint Uses Large footprint non-residential uses may be acceptable as part of a mixed-use area when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a human scale and continuity of activity can be created/maintained on pedestrian priority streets; and • pedestrian quality and neighborhood integrity can be preserved in meeting parking needs. <p>Light Industry Ensure compatibility with the intended character of the area by requiring special approval for the development of new and expanded light industry.</p> <p>Performance Standards Minimize the external impact of high intensity uses on one another and the quality of residential environments (including hours of operation, noise, odor, vibration, glare, truck traffic, the location and design of surface parking and loading/trash collection activity) by establishing performance standards.</p>	<p>Street System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain or create a connected street system to define relatively small blocks and to distribute traffic. • Discourage street closures. • Improve the visual quality and walkability of all area streets. • Identify streets on which a quality pedestrian environment is a top priority (pedestrian priority streets). <p>Balanced Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce dependence on the automobile and the need for on-site parking by encouraging the use of transportation alternatives, including transit, cycling and walking. • Include transit improvements (bus pull-out lanes, benches, shelters) on transit corridors. • Provide bike lanes and other cycling improvements, giving priority to the primary open space framework. • Design streets to be safe and attractive for pedestrians, giving special attention to pedestrian priority streets. • Reinforce the role and importance of alleys in providing services to residential and commercial areas, e.g. garbage collection, utilities and parking. <p>Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the development of shared and/or district parking. • Offer reductions in the required number of parking spaces as a development incentive. • Provide bonuses for deck parking, where appropriate. • Locate parking to the rear of buildings and on the interior of blocks, screened from the street, wherever possible. • Design parking facilities to minimize impacts on the area's visual character and residential uses. <p>Transportation Demand Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage job-generating uses to adopt transportation demand management (TDM) programs that provide incentives for employees to carpool, use transit, walk or cycle to work. • Encourage employer-assisted housing programs to encourage/enable employees to purchase homes within walking distance of work.

*See also requirements for collaborative area-specific planning, Chapter 11 - Area-Specific Plans - Page 151.

Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas

Types	General Purpose	Recommended Uses	Special Considerations
A. Near Downtown	To encourage mixed-use development that serves as an extension of and complement to the Downtown area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of medium- low, medium- and high-density residential uses; retail; service; office; hotel; entertainment; cultural and institutional uses is encouraged. Residential uses are considered an essential component of this mixed-use type. Light industry may be appropriate with special approval. 	
B. Riverfront	To capitalize on the value of the Grand River as a valuable economic, recreational and environmental asset.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of medium- and high-density residential; offices and public educational and cultural uses is encouraged. Residential uses are considered essential and should be given priority on the river's edge. Restaurants and other retail and service commercial uses are encouraged as accessory uses located in the same structure as a primary use. Light industry may be appropriate with special approval; however, new industrial development on the riverfront west of Monroe Avenue should be discouraged. Auto-oriented uses (gas station, car wash, drive through) should be discouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of riverfront land for surface parking lots should be prohibited. Open space and public access to and along the Grand River should be emphasized. Open space setbacks of a minimum of 25' should be provided along the riverfront to permit the extension of the riverwalk. Public access should also be provided through side yard setbacks located perpendicular to the river; these corridors should be located at intervals of approximately 500 feet. Open space should be given priority adjacent to bridges and at the riverfront termini of selected east-west streets. Near West Side area-specific plans should anticipate the extension of 7th and/or 8th Streets under the US-131 embankment and the improvement of the pedestrian tunnel at 10th St. Boulevard treatments should be considered on Monroe Avenue and Front Street.
C. Downtown and Near-Downtown Institutions	To allow for the expansion of institutional (including educational, medical and life science) uses as part of a mixed-use area that protects neighborhood edges and creates walkable streets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of educational or hospital facilities; medical clinics and medical or scientific labs; offices and medium-low, medium- and high-density residential development is encouraged. Retail businesses and services for employees, patients, visitors and residents are encouraged as accessory uses located in the same structure as a primary use. Smaller scale auto-oriented uses may also be appropriate under the conditions suggested in the development objectives for all mixed-use areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a pedestrian orientation along major streets, including generous sidewalk widths, appropriately articulated and detailed architecture and ground level storefronts for retail and service uses.
D. Corridor Residential and Traditional Business Area (TBA) Connectors	To encourage medium and higher density residential on shallow, difficult to market parcels on strip commercial corridors and as connectors between traditional business area (TBA) cores.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of medium- and high-density residential development, residentially scaled office and live/work buildings is encouraged. Office and residential development may incorporate retail and service uses as an accessory ground floor use fronting on a major or regional street. Live/work buildings may contain office, showroom/gallery, workshop, studio or similar spaces on the ground floor with residential units above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage multi-story, rather than single story, buildings.
E. Commercial	To encourage the restructuring of existing commercial areas as compact, walkable centers that include a mix of commercial, civic and residential uses and serve as a focus of neighborhood activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of civic, retail, service and restaurant use, office and high-density residential is encouraged. Small scale auto-oriented uses may be acceptable under the conditions suggested in Figure 3.g - <i>Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas</i> - Page 37. 	



Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas

Types	General Purpose	Recommended Uses	Special Considerations
Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center and Traditional Business Area (TBA) Cores	To encourage the restructuring of existing commercial areas as compact, walkable centers that include a mix of commercial, civic and residential uses and serve as a focus of neighborhood activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mix of civic, retail, service and restaurant uses on the ground floor, with office and medium and high-density residential on the upper stories, is encouraged. • The clustering of retail shops to create a clear destination is encouraged. • Smaller scale auto-oriented uses may be acceptable at the edge of the core under the conditions suggested in development objectives for all mixed-use areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A transit stop and a public gathering place (small park, square or plaza) are considered essential elements of mixed-use center cores. These features are also desirable in TBA cores. • Restructuring of existing commercial areas as mixed-use centers will require significant redevelopment. In contrast, an emphasis on adaptive reuse and new construction that is compatible with the existing developed context is anticipated in TBAs.
Mixed-Use Center Edges	To provide an appropriate transition to existing single family neighborhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium- and high-density residential development should be located closest to the core or inner ring (see below). A mix of medium-low and medium-density residential development should transition to lower densities at the edges of the mixed-use center adjacent to existing single family neighborhoods. 	
Village and Sub-Regional Mixed-Use Center Inner Rings	To accommodate larger-footprint retail and job-generating uses and higher residential densities as part of a mixed-use center.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mix of medium- and high-density residential, live/work units, larger footprint retail uses (grocery, cinema), free-standing offices, other work places with a high employee to floor area ratio, medical clinics, schools and churches are appropriate in the inner ring. 	

opment guidelines for selected examples of mixed-use development, as well as guidelines for higher density residential development, are presented in *Chapter 10 - Development Character - Page 117*. Illustrations of how plan recommendations and guidelines might be applied in several proposed mixed-use areas in Grand Rapids are provided in *Supplement B*.

These Master Plan tools provide the basis for undertaking more detailed area-specific plans for each proposed mixed-use area to determine where existing development (both residential and non-residential) should be protected and enhanced and where future redevelopment should be encouraged. These more detailed planning efforts, undertaken with the collaboration of the city, developers, area land owners, residents and business owners, are essential in establishing a foundation for successful mixed-use development.

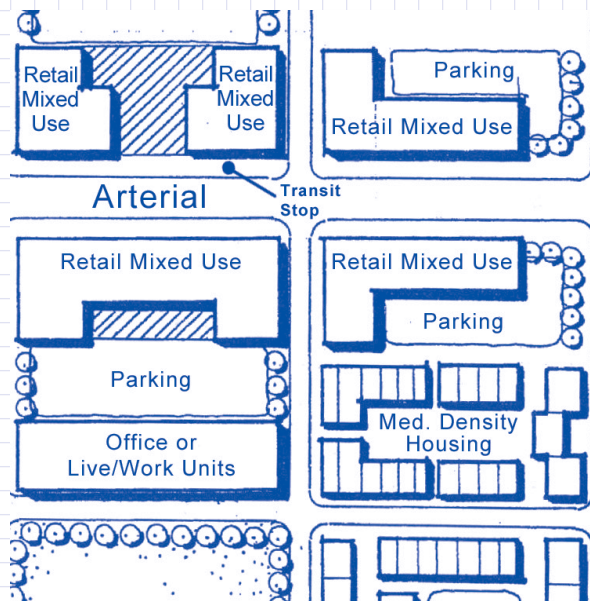
3.3.3 - Coordinating Density with Transit

To further the objective of creating a transit-supportive city, the future location of new medium- and high-density residential development should be coordinated with the alignment of existing and proposed transit routes (*Figure 6.c - Transportation Framework Plan: Streets Map - Page 80*). In the recent past, many higher density residential developments have been located where transit service is limited and jobs, shopping and services are not located within walking distance (approximately ¼ mile). As a result, residents of those developments must rely almost exclusively on their cars, increasing traffic volumes and exacerbating congestion problems on adjacent roadways.

The Master Plan recommends that new medium- and high-density residential development be directed

to areas that are (or will be) well served by transit and/or are within or adjacent to the mixed-use development areas recommended on the Future Land Use Map. (These include Downtown and near Downtown areas, the riverfront, traditional business areas and neighborhood, village and sub-regional centers). Because proposed neighborhood, village and sub-regional centers are located on important existing and proposed transit routes, higher residential densities in these locations will result in a concentration of travel origins and destinations that can increase ridership to support more efficient transit operation and improvements in service (*Chapter 6 - Balanced Transportation - Page 75*).

The Master Plan also recommends that higher density residential redevelopment be encouraged on shallow parcels located on strip commercial corridors, for example, on 28th Street, South Division Avenue



New medium and high-density residential development should be directed to areas that are (or will be) well served by transit and/or are within or adjacent to mixed-use development areas.

and Michigan Street. These shallow parcels are often hard to market for commercial use because of their limited depth. In addition, compatible transitions between commercial development and adjacent low-density housing are difficult to achieve. Higher density residential use, on the other hand, can fit comfortably on these parcels to create a more compatible edge for existing neighborhoods and a 24-hour presence on business district streets, as well as capitalizing on existing transit routes.

3.3.4 - Continuous Neighborhood Reinvestment

A choice in neighborhood types is an asset, as long as there is continuous reinvestment in the housing stock and infrastructure of all neighborhoods. Preserving the stability of strong neighborhoods and revitalizing neighborhoods that are experiencing the stresses of age and disinvestment are high priorities in Grand Rapids. The Master Plan recommends that the city work in collaboration with neighborhood stakeholders to assess physical and demographic conditions and to prepare more detailed area-specific plans for stabilization and/or improvement. These plans will need to address a range of issues that go well beyond physical development, such as, organizational capacity building, community policing and/or programs for youth and the underemployed. (See also Chapter 5 - A Strong Economy - Page 63 and Chapter 9 - Partnerships - Page 109).

Each neighborhood is best qualified to assess its current condition and its place on a continuum from “stable” to “challenged.” Figure 3.i - Neighborhood Characteristics and Preservation Tools/Strategies - Page 40 presents a summary of characteristics and related preservation strategies that can serve as a starting point in determining which combination of strategies is most appropriate in maintaining or improving the stability of each neighborhood.

Figure 3.i - Neighborhood Characteristics and Preservation Tools/Strategies

Stable Neighborhoods



Defining Characteristics

- High owner occupancy
- Well managed rentals
- Good construction and maintenance quality
- Stable/increasing housing value
- “First choice” neighborhood

Tools/Strategies

- Promote traffic calming and walkability, as appropriate
- Establish/enforce housing maintenance codes
- Support historic preservation efforts where appropriate
- Maintain infrastructure
- Support neighborhood-based organization and collaborative planning



Figure 3.i - Neighborhood Characteristics and Preservation Tools/Strategies

Neighborhoods in Transition



Defining Characteristics

- High owner occupancy
- Moderate to good quality construction and maintenance
- Some poorly managed rentals
- Stable to slightly decreasing/increasing values
- Losing/gaining ground as a “first choice” neighborhood

Tools/Strategies

All of the previous Tools/Strategies, plus:

- Promote home ownership
- Expand low-interest loan programs for maintenance and rehabilitation
- Restrict conversions to multifamily
- Register/regularly inspect rental units; work with landlords to improve maintenance and management
- Organize/support neighborhood organizations; provide planning technical assistance
- Provide community policing

Declining/Improving Neighborhoods



Defining Characteristics

- Decline or increase in owner and long-term occupancy
- Increasing conversion of single-family to multifamily rental (or the reverse); absentee landlords
- Moderate quality construction and poor or improving maintenance
- Declining or rising values
- Deteriorated structures; vacant buildings
- Not a “first choice” neighborhood; working to become one

Tools/Strategies

All of the previous Tools/Strategies, plus:

- Provide low interest maintenance and repair loans
- Consider tax freeze/abatement on renovation/improvements
- Bring tax delinquent properties to non-profits more quickly
- Consider reverse equity program for seniors
- Consider acquisition of problem rental properties
- Acquire key sites for rehabilitation, demolition and infill based on adopted design guidelines
- Repair/resurface streets, sidewalks, lighting
- Maintain/improve parks

Challenged Neighborhoods



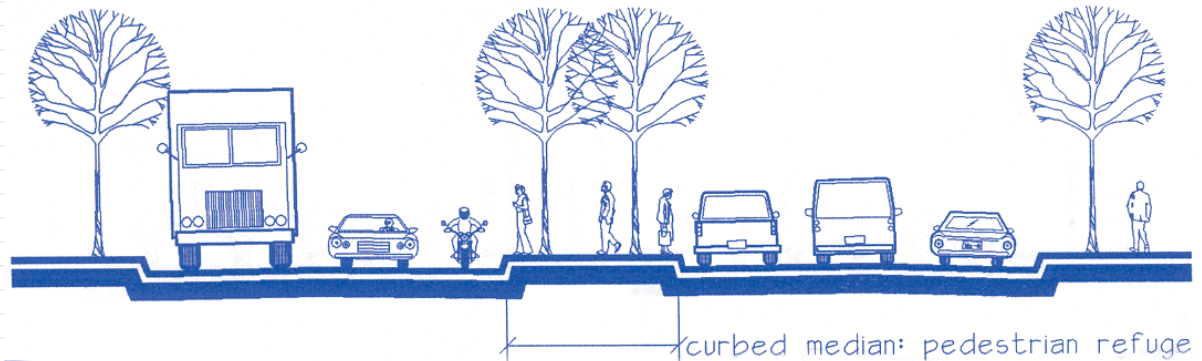
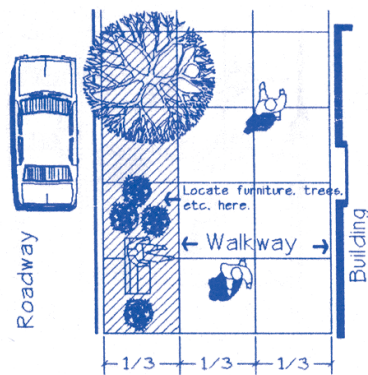
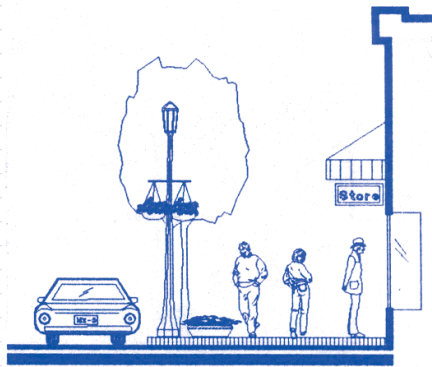
Defining Characteristics

- More rental than ownership; absentee landlords
- Moderate quality construction and poor maintenance
- More deteriorated structures and vacant buildings; vacant lots
- Lowest property values
- Neighborhood of least choice

Tools/Strategies

All of the previous Tools/Strategies, plus:

- Provide low interest infill development loans
- More aggressive acquisition and clearing of deteriorated structures and vacant lots for infill
- Strategic assembly of parcels/blocks for infill or redevelopment
- City-sponsored clean-up efforts
- Infrastructure improvements coordinated with redevelopment
- Conversion to non-residential use
- Clearance and assembly for redevelopment
- Coordinated infrastructure improvements



Illustrations from *Street Classification Policy*

3.3.5 - Focus on Walkability

All Grand Rapids citizens want neighborhoods that are safe and appealing for people on foot and bicycles, as well as in cars. Many would also like to live within walking distance of shopping, parks, schools and churches so that they have the option of having fewer cars or leaving their cars at home. Both the design of the city's streets and the planning of its future land use patterns can contribute to walkability.

Street Design

The city has already established recommended guidelines to better balance the use of space within public street rights-of-way to create an attractive environment for walking and biking, as well as movement corridors for cars and trucks. These guidelines are presented in the *Street Classification Policy* (1996).

Land Use Patterns

Neighborhoods can be more walkable if they incorporate a mix of uses like Downtown and pre-World

War II neighborhoods already do. Many of these older neighborhoods include business districts, typically along former streetcar routes, that were built before car ownership was widespread. These traditional business areas were designed to create a human scale and be pedestrian orientated. Although some of these characteristics have been eroded over time, the original traditional business area provides a model for walkability that can be restored and replicated in the future.

The idea of organizing development into compact mixed-use centers offers an alternative to the more familiar auto-dependent pattern of lining mile after mile of the city's roadways with strip commercial development. Adopting this alternative land use pattern as a strategy for re-structuring commercial areas in both pre- and post-World War II neighborhoods is one of the Master Plan's most important recommendations. (See *Chapter 4 - Vital Business Districts - Page 47*)



Photo courtesy of ArtWorks Expanded Visions 2001 youth apprenticeship program.

3.4 - Objectives and Policies

The following objectives and policies summarize what should be done to achieve the vision and plan recommendations presented on the preceding pages so that Grand Rapids becomes a city of “great neighborhoods” and a residential location of choice for many types of households in the metropolitan region.

Above each objective is a line of theme icons. The icons illustrate how a particular objective is interrelated with another Master Plan theme. See Page 24 for a description of each theme.



Objective GN 1

Document and market the amenities Grand Rapids offers (for example, convenience, cultural and recreational assets and housing choice) as a competitive residential location within the region.



Objective GN 2

Provide a choice in neighborhood types.

- Protect the character of existing neighborhoods by maintaining overall existing residential densities and building patterns.
- Build on the special assets of older neighborhoods by encouraging housing rehabilitation and establishing and administering building and maintenance codes that encourage renovation and improve housing quality.
- Encourage the preservation and reuse of historically and architecturally significant structures/areas.
- Encourage mixed-use development in the areas identified on the Future Land Use Map to expand the range of neighborhood choices within the city (*Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21 and Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38*).
- Develop area-specific plans, standards and guidelines that promote the compatibility of new development and rehabilitation projects with the existing density and visual character of

the surrounding context; incorporate site planning and architectural design principles in zoning and building codes.

- Recognize the importance of alleys in urban neighborhoods and promote alley improvement projects.



Objective GN 3

Promote a broad range of high quality housing choices.

- Maintain and increase the number and variety of housing units (e.g., owner-occupied and rental serving young adults, seniors, low- and moderate-income households, special needs populations, middle and upper income households) to meet the diverse needs of existing residents and to attract new residents to the city.
- Allow for new housing products: for example, small-lot single-family housing, site condominiums, live/work units, upper story residences in commercial districts and “granny flats” (accessory apartments) in single family neighborhoods where adequate parking can be provided.
- Allow for a range of housing types within all neighborhoods to provide residents the opportunity to progress through various life stages while maintaining their attachment to a particular area of the city.



Objective GN 4

Encourage racial, ethnic and income diversity within neighborhoods.

- a. Ensure equal access to housing opportunity consistent with federal, state and local fair housing laws.
- b. Encourage a mix of affordable, mid-price and upper-end housing choices across the city through a combination of preservation, rehabilitation and new construction.
- c. Maintain affordable home ownership and rental opportunities in revitalizing neighborhoods.



Objective GN 5

Support home ownership.

- a. Encourage affordable housing construction by working with non-profits and area financial institutions to increase funding commitments for home mortgages and home improvements, rehabilitation and infill.
- b. Provide homebuyer education.
- c. Offer loan assistance programs for maintenance, repair and rehabilitation to low- and moderate-income home owners.
- d. Encourage area businesses and institutions to develop/participate in employer-assisted home ownership programs.



Objective GN 6

Provide quality rental housing.

- a. Encourage the development of affordable, mid-price and upper-end rental housing throughout the city, while discouraging the conversion of single-family homes to multifamily use.
- b. Work with landlords to improve the maintenance and management of existing rental property to protect property values.
- c. Involve both landlords and tenants in improving rental housing quality.
- d. Educate tenants about their rights, landlord responsibilities and the rights of surrounding property owners.



Objective GN 7

Locate new higher density residential development to capitalize on transit and improve land use transitions.

- a. Locate higher residential densities on transit routes and within walking distance of business areas.
- b. Encourage the restructuring of existing commercial areas as more compact, mixed-use, pedestrian and transit-oriented centers that include higher density residential development. *(See proposed neighborhood, village and sub-regional mixed-use centers on the Future Land Use Map, Figure 2.a - Page 21. See also the descriptions of mixed-use areas in Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37, Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special*

Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas - Page 38 and Figure 4.b - Hierarchy of Mixed-Use Centers - Page 56.)

- c. Encourage higher density residential development in revitalizing existing traditional business areas. *(See Mixed-use Type D in Figure 3.h - Page 38.)*
- d. Encourage the introduction of higher density residential development to better utilize shallow parcels on strip commercial corridors and to create improved transitions between single family neighborhoods and major streets *(see, for example, 28th Street and Michigan Street on the Future Land Use Map, Figure 2.a - Page 21).*



Objective GN 8

Collaborate with neighborhoods, business organizations, institutions and other key stakeholders in planning and development decisions.

- a. Support active neighborhood and business organizations and collaboration with faith-based and non-profit organizations.
- b. Encourage business, resident and institutional collaboration in preparing area-specific plans that balance neighborhood values, business expansion and economic development needs.
- c. With community participation, develop and implement strategies and tools to address neighborhoods of varying levels of stability.
- d. Undertake targeted, comprehensive neighborhood improvement programs.
- e. Encourage institutions to plan for modernization and expansion in cooperation with adjacent neighborhood and business organizations.



Objective GN 9

Maximize the positive impact of public investment in development projects.

- Support coordinated and targeted public, private and non-profit neighborhood revitalization efforts for maximum impact.
- Use public investments strategically to promote stabilization and private investment in neighborhoods in need of improvement.
- Leverage desired private investment with public investments in improving the quality of the public realm (streets, streetscapes, open spaces).



Objective GN 10

Promote walkable neighborhoods by encouraging the development of a connected street system and allowing for a mix of uses.

- Preserve the connected street system edged by sidewalks in older neighborhoods, and provide for street and sidewalk connections where new development is planned, to make walking and cycling feasible and attractive options.
- Encourage the development of more compact, unified and walkable business districts that provide a mix of uses (retail, office, entertainment and higher density residential) in a well-designed pedestrian-oriented environment.



Objective GN 11

Make streets a neighborhood asset.

- Design streets to provide a safe and appealing environment for people on foot and on bicycles, as well as in cars.
- Encourage safe speeds on neighborhood streets to enhance safety for drivers and residents.
- Slow traffic through physical design.
- Provide safe and appealing pedestrian and bicycle zones on appropriate residential streets and to link neighborhoods.
- Provide/maintain a street improvement, tree planting and maintenance program in cooperation with developers, property owners and neighborhood and business organizations.
- Support the use of alleys for service functions and promote alley improvement projects.



Objective GN 12

Provide safe neighborhoods.

- Support active neighborhood organizations, effective community policing and neighborhood watch programs to ensure safety in all city neighborhoods.
- Light streets and alleyways.
- Follow the principles (territoriality, surveillance and access control) of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to encourage the design of safer built environments.

- Secure abandoned buildings; hold owners accountable for, and assist where appropriate in, their timely rehabilitation and reuse (or demolition).



Objective GN 13

Enhance neighborhood recreational opportunities.

- Encourage the provision of parks, public squares and other safe and attractive gathering places in all neighborhoods.
- Maintain city-school partnerships to provide neighborhood park and open space opportunities.
- Develop and operate recreation centers in different areas of the city.
- Design parks to optimize diverse use in response to community and neighborhood needs and preferences.



Objective GN 14

Recognize the important role of neighborhood schools in building and maintaining communities.

- Capitalize on neighborhood schools' potential to serve as points of delivery for a range of family support, youth development and recreation services.
- Develop partnerships between the public schools, neighborhoods, area business organizations and institutions of higher learning to enhance the quality of facilities and equipment; and improve educational outcomes for all students.

